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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 002060

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ELECTIONS](#)

SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: POORLY-ATTENDED FMLN "PRIMARIES"

RUBBER-STAMP HARDLINER SLATE

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 1079

[1](#)B. SAN SALVADOR 1673

[1](#)C. SAN SALVADOR 1747

Classified By: A/DCM Mark Silverman, Reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Although FMLN leaders were hesitant to provide exact numbers of voters at each polling place, it appeared that only about one-third of eligible party activists bothered to participate in Sunday's primaries for March 2006 municipal and Legislative Assembly elections. In San Salvador, it was reported that as few as 800 votes were cast (out of more than 3,600 eligible activists), while in many municipalities including Uluazapa and San Jorge (both in San Miguel Department), primaries were hastily canceled when virtually no voters appeared.

[1](#)2. (C) An April 3 FMLN convention basically abolished the party's traditional primaries, replacing them with an orthodox-controlled process of "consensus" that offered little transparency (see reftel A). Handal-ally Violeta Menjivar appeared as the sole candidate for Mayor of San Salvador, in place of moderate incumbent Mayor Carlos Rivas Zamora, who hardliners did not allow to run. Similar scenarios unfolded in most of the nation's 262 municipalities; moderates prevailed in only five (Chalatenango, La Libertad, Quetzaltepeque, Santa Tecla, and Zacatecoluca). In the race for Legislative Assembly nominee in San Vicente, Tecoluca Mayor Carlos Cortez defeated Schafik Handal's son Jorge Handal 1,500 to 900. Santa Tecla Mayor Oscar Ortiz and Legislative Assembly Deputy Hugo Martinez were two of the very few high-profile moderates remaining as FMLN candidates for 2006; both will seek reelection to their current positions.

[1](#)3. (C) The FMLN primaries took place in the wake of further recent hemorrhages of party activists. The June 8 mass resignation of more than 200 mostly Santa Ana activists (see reftel B) was followed by the formation of the new Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR; see reftel C); the July 9 resignation attempt by 300 Sonsonate FMLN militants was thwarted by hardliners' simple if desperate expedient of simply locking party headquarters to forestall the submission of resignations. In withdrawing her name from consideration July 13, the party's Deputy Delegation Chief in the Legislative Assembly, Celina Monterrosa, cited the primary process's lack of credibility. The following day, some 25 high-ranking San Salvador municipal officials, including three city council members, deserted the FMLN. Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) Deputy Jose Luis Medrano and Alternate Deputy Vladimir Alfaro resigned from the party the same day, complaining that the Front's leadership had ceased to listen to the people it ostensibly represented.

4 (C) COMMENT: The Sunday primaries, which FMLN moderates had characterized as a form of "dedocracia" (i.e., government by the hand-picked) occurred against the backdrop of continued high approval ratings for President Sacal, now more than one year into his term. Party hardliners put the best face they could on the results; close Handal ally and party spokesman Sigfrido Reyes called the primaries a "democratic exercise" that "we challenge other parties to imitate", but they must privately shudder at facing next March a united, well-organized, and resurgent ARENA, while their own ranks totter in division and disarray. END COMMENT
Barclay